

Something's Brewing in Capital

Secret Huddles: Berlin or Cuba?

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WASHINGTON.

Top American diplomatic and military officials held extraordinary conferences behind a wall of secrecy yesterday as large-scale air-sea and ground movements were reported under way.

The meetings went on all day and into the night. Their purpose was obviously something bigger than mere maneuvers, although military maneuvers are going on in the Caribbean. Never before had so many top officials gathered at their offices on a Sunday for so long.

Either something very big was brewing or the Kennedy administration wanted to create the impression that it was.

President Kennedy was at the White House. He cancelled a week-end political stamping tour of the Mid-West and Far-West to return to Washington. The official reason was that he had a cold and less than one degree of fever. He went to church with Mrs. Kennedy yesterday morning, looking hale and hearty.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk was at the State Department with his top advisers. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was at the Pentagon with his. Efforts to break through to them and their aids for an inkling on what was going on were fruitless.

So great was the secrecy that underlings in some cases told bald-faced lies, apparently on orders. "He is not in his office," they would say to reporters who only minutes before had caught glimpses of a top official.

In the absence of any official guidance of any kind it was dangerous to speculate. However, a few possibilities stood out above others:

1. Perhaps the Kennedy administration had found that Cuba has acquired offensive military capability. President Kennedy said Sept. 13 that, if this happens, the United States would take some action.

2. The President wants to demonstrate American ability to handle a two-front crisis. Caribbean maneuvers involving 20,000 men, 45 warships and hundreds of aircraft already are under way. He may want to execute a similar maneuver involving Berlin.

Rumors have been current for a couple of days that Cuba was in the process of acquiring medium-range missiles and bombers. One unconfirmed report was that the Cubans were building emplacements for a 1,400-mile-range rocket. Another unconfirmed report was that Russia was giving Cuba 10 IL-28 twin-jet Eagle bombers with a 1,400-mile range.

Circumstances also pointed to a possible strong statement, perhaps accompanied by some show of determination, concerning Berlin. The Kennedy administration has been at pains in recent months to get across the idea that the worst Berlin crisis of all is being prepared by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev for this late fall.

AMERICA'S British and French allies do not share this apprehension. Russian diplomats in Washington have scoffed at it. Nevertheless, American officials insist that the danger is very real.

Forceful Demonstration

President Kennedy has indicated a willingness to talk to Soviet Premier Khrushchev if he comes to the United States. Mr. Khrushchev has kept his own counsel on this issue. But his spokesman, Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, talked last week for more than two hours with President Kennedy and four hours with Secretary Rusk, maintaining a very firm line on Berlin and insisting that, despite the American attitude that Berlin is "not negotiable," some negotiations must be held.

In the light of the fruitless Kennedy-Rusk-Gromyko talks, the President may be preparing a forceful demonstration of his determination. It would be characteristic of Mr. Kennedy to do something like this.

If this speculation has any merit, the hush-hush Pentagon consultations would be aimed at selecting air and ground units which might be rushed to Europe.

President Kennedy's Sept. 13 statement on Cuba at a news conference was quiet explicit. He said the United States "would do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies" in the event that Cuba threatened the Guantanamo Naval Base, Cape Canaveral or Panama; attempted to export Castro communism, or set up a Soviet military base with offensive capability.

"If Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive action against the United States . . . the United States would act," Mr. Kennedy said.

He explained at that time that